

Innovative Approaches for Engaging Community Partners in Research Pilot Grant Reviews

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The UNM TREE Center has funded numerous one-year pilot research projects focused on mental and behavioral health issues. The announcement and review of pilot proposals have had active community engagement through innovative approaches developed by the Community Engagement and Dissemination Core (CEDC) of the TREE Center.

Each year the CEDC travels throughout the state and meets with community/tribal behavioral health stakeholders to disseminate information bi-directionally in what we are calling *Communities of Practice for Dissemination* (COP4D) gatherings. Place-based partnerships include the communities of: Chimayo, Las Cruces, Farmington, Gallup, Hobbs, Pecos, Shiprock and Farmington (Navajo Nation).

In the COP4D meetings an update is provided on the TREE's yearly activities and pilot research posters are posted on the walls. The posters have been modified to be community-friendly in layout and information. These posters are not only informative but also set the stage in gathering local research interest around behavioral health (i.e., jurisdiction and policies, opioids and grandparents caring for grandchildren). The gathered community/tribal issues are shared with the TREE Center's Investigator Development Core who then includes the community research priorities in the annual request for pilot funding.

The pilot proposals receive a rigorous review by both UNM reviewers and volunteer from our COP4D partners. To assist the COP4D reviewers the CEDC developed a community-friendly review matrix that has greatly enhanced in the review process. The CEDC also holds individual and group phone calls to review each proposal allowing the reviewers the opportunity to raise questions and concerns. Once the proposals are scored and submitted, the review team (UNM & COP4D) come together for an in-person discussion and everyone at the review table has an equal voice and vote. Our COP4D partners have strengthened the review process and identified how to improve the community engaged research design of the pilot projects.

COP4D members expressed that their participation has been an invaluable experience which they plan to share back with their communities. A few have noted how the TREE Center is actively engaging participation in the important work of advancing mental and behavioral health through the pilot projects.

Understanding and developing research reviewer skill-sets among COP4D members is fundamental in successful community engagement and critical in advancing community/tribal knowledge.